

**Executive Summary**  
**External Consultant Report on Fraternity and Sorority Life**  
**University of Pittsburgh**

**Fraternity/Sorority Life Advisement and Membership**

The advisement of fraternity/sorority life is housed in the Office of Cross Cultural and Leadership Development (CCLD). The University of Pittsburgh fraternity/sorority chapters fall under the leadership of the Tri-Council (Collegiate Panhellenic Association, National Pan-Hellenic Council, and Interfraternity Council). According to Spring 2018 grade reports, current membership is comprised of:

- **National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC):** Total 37 (Fall 2018 - 17 members)  
Six chapters ranging from 1-10 members
- **Collegiate Panhellenic Association (Panhellenic):** Total 1302  
Eleven (11) chapters ranging from 68-136 members
- **Interfraternity Council (IFC):** Total 946  
Eighteen (18) chapters ranging from 8-122 members

**The Methodology of the Fraternity/Sorority Life Evaluation**

An external review team provided a baseline evaluation for continuous community improvement. Three consultants from both [Npower](#) and [Limberlost Consulting](#), served as partners and evaluators.

The following activities took place between November 12-20, 2018:

- Reviewed fraternity/sorority community background materials from the University staff, e.g. policies, procedures, grade reports, incident reports, and event announcements
- Solicited feedback from 35 fraternity/sorority headquarters' partners
- Conducted seven individual interviews and 13 on-site focus group meetings and
- Interviewed 170 individuals comprised of students, university stakeholders, and alumni

**Analysis of Data (categorized as Strengths, Weaknesses and Threats, Opportunities for Improvement, Options for Action)**

**Strengths**

Participants were asked about strengths of the fraternity/sorority community, not individual chapters. Six key themes emerged:

1. **Community Engagement:** With over 25,000 undergraduate students at Pitt, fraternities and sororities help make a large urban university feel smaller. In almost all focus groups, members were described as “engaged,” “passionate,” “involved,” and “supportive” in the Pitt community. Staff, alumni, and the students reported that they enjoy and “support each others’ philanthropy events.” The fraternity/sorority community appears well-integrated into the overall Pitt student body.
2. **Brotherhood/Sisterhood Relationships:** Relationships are core to the overall fraternity/sorority experience. Focus group student participants like how “everyone has a sense of trust with each other.”
3. **Tri-Council (consists of three fraternity/sorority governing councils):** One chapter advisor noticed “more collaboration” among the councils. The council leaders themselves describe the Tri-Council as “genuinely supportive of each other,” providing “good communication,” and consisting of “strong relationships.”
4. **Leadership Experiences:** Staff in the career development office mentioned “leadership skills” as key takeaways from the fraternal experience. Greeks learn to work with others through committees, make difficult decisions with others, plan events and activities, budget appropriately, and motivate and empower others to do work. Members are perceived as “more marketable” in the job search process.

5. **University Expectations:** A community-wide suspension of activities by the Vice Provost and Dean of Students was put into effect in Spring 2018. Some students viewed the suspension as dramatic, but many remarked on a resulting “different mindset (of membership) toward a wellness mindset.”
6. **Relationship with Police:** The police have established a good working relationship with fraternity/sorority members at Pitt through outreach programs and a community policing model. The meeting with representatives of the University of Pittsburgh Police Department (UPD) was generally positive. Officers noted the number of transports of students for alcohol-related reasons was “down” this semester. Both UPD and the City of Pittsburgh Police use and are comfortable with the Pitt referral system, alerting University personnel and providing information when a student is involved.

### Three Strengths Noted by the Consultants

#### Deep and Wide Support of the Fraternal Experience

1. The three consultants noticed one unique strength of the community: “There is not an anti-fraternity sentiment in the student affairs division.” Many student affairs professionals have high, yet reasonable, expectations of the Greek community.
2. Upper-level administration support is assertive and visible with a photograph timeline wall mural which stretches the entire floor on the floor of the Vice Provost and Dean of Students’ Office. The consultants had never seen a similar mural dedicated to Greek life.
3. Immediate financial and personnel investments (adding two entry-level staff members) have been made to the Fraternity/Sorority Life staff in 2018-2019.

#### Weaknesses and Threats

Two key themes emerged as weaknesses and threats, and two additional key themes emerged as opportunities for improvement:

1. **Hazing** *14 mentions in the focus group:* Within the last two academic years, the University of Pittsburgh has also experienced high-profile hazing incidents that have prompted the University community to reflect on the practice and find better ways to on-board and educate students engaging in new member processes. Three categories of hazing emerged: subtle (intimidation), harassment, and violent. Students stated that they have an 8- to 10-week pledge process, and described activities they participated in (as either a perpetrator or a recipient).

Activities Described:	Reasons Cited for Engaging in Hazing Practices:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Forced food and alcohol consumption</li> <li>● Paddling</li> <li>● Psychological hazing</li> <li>● Cyber bullying</li> <li>● Manipulation</li> <li>● Extended time away from academics</li> <li>● Abductions/kidnapping</li> <li>● Exposure to cold weather or extreme heat without appropriate protection</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Tradition: “I had to go through it; you should too.”</li> <li>● Rationalization: “People should focus on the good work we do like philanthropy.”</li> <li>● Culture of one-upmanship</li> <li>● Lack of compassion for fellow students</li> <li>● Lack of individual accountability</li> <li>● Group think (noted by administrators)</li> <li>● Lack of alumni involvement or negative alumni involvement</li> <li>● Influence of alcohol</li> <li>● Influence of underground organizations that cement the hazing culture</li> </ul>

Eight (8) administrators referred to “repeat offenders” and underground organizations that contribute to the hazing culture on campus. One administrator stated, “they (students) won’t get it until they kill someone.”

The administration has taken steps to increase education about hazing and the University’s policy and position on this type of misconduct. Students stated, “bystander intervention (training) is not great” in general, and not very comprehensive with regards to hazing.

Many students were confused by how the University holds students accountable for violating policy broadly. There is an understanding of the policy, but it does not relate to the nuances they experience. To compound this confusion, students felt the University office responsible for adjudication was adversarial, and University expectations were not transparent. Students want a better understanding of the conduct process; they perceive some groups as receiving harsher sanctions for lesser transgressions.

2. **Alcohol Culture** *12 mentions in the focus group*: The top concern, voiced by the top student affairs administrator and other student affairs professionals is answering the question, “Did we keep someone’s child safe while she or he was here at Pitt?” This concern was most often framed in the context of alcohol consumption as opposed to hazing in an IFC fraternity.

The consistently reported effects of alcohol consumption included fights, falling from buildings, acute intoxication (especially by first-year students). The use of alcohol permeates nearly every activity (including ritual and events associated with Greek Week) in the Panhellenic and IFC chapters.

A community weakness shared was the students’ general short-view of the community-wide suspension, summarized in this comment: “Students see the end goal as being able to host parties, rather than creating systemic change.”

### Opportunities for Improvement

3. **Alumni Impact** *8 mentions in the focus group*: Alumni support for undergraduates at Pitt is disappointing and frustrating. Several undergraduates complained that there is next to no support for undergraduates from alumni. Alumni do not attend special occasions such as initiation, homecoming, or founders’ day events, nor do they regularly attend chapter meetings. Mentoring from alumni is rare. Younger alumni demonstrate a negative influence for chapters by glorifying hazing and alcohol consumption. Older alumni are out of touch with the challenges and issues that undergraduates face today.
4. **National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC)** *5 mentions in the focus group*: Many members of the NPHC, both students and alumni, acknowledge that they participate in hazing activities. Some students stated the “entire council is made”—meaning they all have an underground pledge process. Those students disclosed they participate in an unofficial process that is well beyond their national organizations’ expectations, and they have attended the “set” of other organizations. Students state that they feel pressure to provide the social outlet for “Black Pitt.” “Black Pitt” is defined as the community of Black students and student organizations at Pitt. They also acknowledge they do not follow appropriate party registration and risk management protocols, and they are not entirely familiar with the rules. As a council, chapter members initially stated that they were unified; but after some questioning, they relented and revealed that there are some deep divisions within the council, e.g. tension between the NPHC and Black Action Society and lack of participation in the NPHC meetings, NPHC-sponsored community service, and philanthropic projects.

## Options for Action

### Hazing:

- Provide hazing education for students and staff
- Communicate regularly with parents
- Evaluate and standardize the new member education period
- Adopt assessment tools to track experience and satisfaction of new members with the new member education program
- Establish conduct code language addressing underground organizations
- Provide students with a chapter's conduct history
- Require specific training for the new member educators before they can serve in this capacity

### Alcohol Culture:

- Strategize with new CCLD personnel on risk management education and advising needs
- Create relevant council-specific education sessions
- Fully utilize GAMMA (Greeks Advocating the Mature Management of Alcohol) as a peer education and intervention tool
- Strengthen the University-wide peer education program using the [National Association of Student Personnel Administrators' \(NASPA\) model](#)
- Invest in community-wide sober monitor training and strengthen bystander intervention education
- Continue to develop and strengthen the relationship with police

### Alumni Impact:

- Create list of volunteers
- Solicit coaching for chapter leaders from headquarters staff on how to manage disruptive alumni
- Invite alumni to offer their time and talents beyond chapter advisement
- Develop strategy for consistent alumni communications
- Host an Alumni Summit on alcohol, hazing, and other risk management and safety issues
- Work to get at least two alumni advisors/mentors for each chapter
- Take full advantage of regional events by various national organizations held at the University

### National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC)

- Educate strategically on hazing, risk management, and intake
- Draft a policy on chapter size
- Engage with the larger fraternity/sorority community
- Contextualize programming and services
- Focus on building the council